



On the Rationale behind the Roman Wars of Šābuhr II the Great

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1. Introduction

The impetus for Šābuhr's large-scale Roman campaigns in the second half of the fourth century C.E. undoubtedly lies in the inherent inequity of the peace treaty of Nisibis in 298 C.E., concluded between the Sasanian king Narseh and Diocletian's Caesar in the East, Galerius. Narseh was under duress, for the fate of the entire imperial train (his wife and children), which had fallen into Roman hands during the battle of Satala in Armenia, hung in the balance. He was thus forced to accept the disadvantageous terms of the treaty, which were not intended to generate lasting peace with Persia but instead prepared the ground for future hostilities.¹

Accordingly, Šābuhr II's aim, once his rule had been consolidated, was to reclaim the territories stripped from his grandfather Narseh in the wake of the treaty of Nisibis that had resulted in Armenia becoming a Roman vassal state and Mesopotamia being lost to the Sasanians—the Transtigritane territories were yielded to Rome in Upper Mesopotamia and the Tigris was established as the frontier between the two states in Lower Mesopotamia.²

The aim of this essay is not to provide a chronicle of Šābuhr II's Roman Wars, but rather to discuss the political rationale behind them.³ In particular, Šābuhr II's alleged claim to former Achaemenid territories under Constantius II's reign will be investigated, by taking into account the intent of comparable demands made by Šābuhr II's predecessors, Ardaxšīr I and Šābuhr I, almost a century before. Following a brief survey of Šābuhr II's early career, the *status quaestionis* of Achaemenid reminiscences in early Sasanian Iran will be presented by focusing on Iranian epigraphic material.

2. On Šābuhr II's Genealogy and Early Career

Šābuhr is the throne name of Ōhrmazd II's son and successor,⁴ whom Ṭabarī⁵ and other Muslim writers such as Ṭa'ālībī⁶ and Mas'ūdī⁷ call *Du'l-aktāf* "the man with the shoulders," a title that either referred to the burden of state affairs Šābuhr took upon himself during his reign,⁸ or, in conformity with the title of *hūba-sombā* "who pierces shoulders" conferred upon him by Persian writers such as Ḥamza,⁹ pertained to Šābuhr's energetic and harsh rebuke of Arab tribes,¹⁰ or to his alleged harsh treatment of Arab captives.¹¹

2.1. Genealogy and Early Career

In Šābuhr's inscription at Tāq-e Bostān (ŠTBn, ll. 5–11), the king calls himself son of Ōhrmazd (II), and grandson of King Narseh (*nab bay Narseh šāhān šāh*). Šābuhr seems to have been the youngest son of King Ōhrmazd II, who, judging from the accounts of classical authors, is reported to have had at least three, possibly four, other sons. In spite of some discrepancies in the classical sources, they seem to indicate that the oldest of Ōhrmazd II's sons, Ādur-Narseh (*Adarnases*), who succeeded his father, was dethroned shortly upon his accession; the second in line, Ōhrmazd (*Hormisdas*), was put in chains, although he was subsequently able to escape and take refuge in Rome; and the third was reportedly rendered incapable of ruling for having been blinded.

Zosimus knows only of two sons of Ōhrmazd II, namely, *Hormisdas* and possibly Šābuhr II,¹² whereas John of Antioch ascribes four sons to King Ōhrmazd II, whom he erroneously confuses with Narseh.¹³ Depending on how the

name Σάπωρος is read in John of Antioch's account, that is, as Σάπωρον, or Σάπωρος, it was either Ādur-Narseh, who upon his succession, blinded his brother Šābuhr (Σάπωρον)—namesake but not identical with Šābuhr II—and imprisoned *Hormisdas*, or it was Šābuhr II himself (Σάπωρος) and those supporting his cause, who, upon the elimination of Ādur-Narseh, blinded his unnamed brother and put *Hormisdas* into chains.¹⁴ This latter version is also embraced by Zonaras,¹⁵ who, like John of Antioch, reports that there were three brothers of Šābuhr II: *Adarnases*, *Hormisdas*, and an unidentified third.¹⁶

The combined evidence of the classical and epigraphic sources offers the following picture: upon Ōhrmazd II's death, his oldest son Ādur-Narseh succeeded him to the throne but was removed and eventually blinded to prevent any future claims to the throne. The reported blinding, therefore, must relate to Ādur-Narseh, rather than to a third, unidentified, son.¹⁷ Were we to give preference to the reading Σάπωρον, instead of Σάπωρος, in the account of John of Antioch, then Ōhrmazd II's other son called Šābuhr, mistakenly reported to have been blinded, could be equated with Šābuhr *Sagān šāh*, whom we know from two inscriptions at Persepolis (ŠPs. I-II) dated to the second and eighteenth regal years of Šābuhr II.¹⁸ Šābuhr *Sagān šāh*, who, by the second year of his (infant) brother's reign ruled over the provinces of India, Sagestān, and Tūrān up to the coast of the sea (*Hind Sagestān ud Tūrestān tā drayā damb*), seems to have occupied an important position at the court of his brother Šābuhr II, which he is unlikely to have held had he been previously blinded at the behest of Ādur-Narseh. Thus, Šābuhr *Sagān šāh*, evidently remaining loyal to the cause of the infant king Šābuhr II, seems to have been richly rewarded for his allegiance, as evidenced by the rulership over the important eastern provinces of Sagestān and Tūrestān bestowed upon him. It is en route to his new post, coming from his brother's court, that Šābuhr, king of Sagestān, ordered his inscription to be composed.¹⁹

As regards *Hormisdas*, from the outset he must have fostered royal aspirations, which were the cause of his imprisonment by Šābuhr's supporters.

The future king Ardashīr, successor to Šābuhr II, could have been the fourth son of Ōhrmazd II.²⁰ According to Syriac sources, Ardashīr occupied the throne of Adiabene (*Heḏyab*) during

the reign of his brother,²¹ which is a further indication that, aside from *Hormisdas*, Šābuhr II's (other) older brothers remained loyal to him and prospered.

2.2. Šābuhr's Arab Campaigns

The earliest accounts of Šābuhr II's career are in connection with the king's punitive campaigns in the first quarter of the fourth century C.E. against Arab tribes that were reported to have crossed from the region in which the 'Abd-al-Qays were settled, that is, from Bahrain, Kāzima, and Ḥajar, over to Persis.²² These campaigns raided and pillaged the region of *Ardaxšīr-Xwarrah*, as well as cities such as *Rēw-Ardaxšīr*.²³

Upon reaching maturity, Šābuhr is reported to have reacted by carrying the war over to the Arab Peninsula, where he ravaged the tribes responsible for the incursions. What is more, he pacified the Arab tribes settled in territories adjacent to the Roman *limes* and subjected them to the authority of the king of kings.²⁴

A victim of the Persian raids in the Peninsula may have been the Laḥmid king Imru' al-Qays, initially a Persian vassal king of Hira, whose father, the Laḥmid king 'Amr al-Qays, is mentioned in the inscription of Paikuli as *Amru Laḥmāyēn šāh* in the penultimate list of dignitaries who abided by Narseh's advice and counsel (*pad amā pand ud pāyēs*).²⁵ Imru' al-Qays seems to have switched his allegiance to Rome, possibly following Šābuhr II's carnage amidst Arab tribes, since he is again reported in an Arabic funerary inscription dated to 328 C.E. that was found at Namāra, wherein he depicts himself as *mri'i l-qaysi bar 'amrin maliki l-'arabi* "(of) Imru' al-Qays, son of 'Amr, king of the Arabs" in the service of the Romans.²⁶

It is possible that Šābuhr's extensive foray into the Arab Peninsula and Syria not only served the purpose of preparing the grounds for the looming confrontation with Rome by pacifying the king's southeastern flank but also procured the means for the anticipated Roman campaigns, despite the assertions of Muslim writers that Šābuhr ordered no loot (*ḡanīma*) to be taken.²⁷ The absence of any reactions to Šābuhr's Arab campaign has been traditionally seen as a deliberate gesture by the Romans to compensate the Persian power, at the expense of Arab tribes, for the major losses

suffered consequent upon the treaty of Nisibis in 298 C.E.²⁸

2.3. *Prelude and Causes of Šābuhr II's Roman Wars*

Before carrying out a formal breach with the treaty of Nisibis, Šābuhr II appears to have sent a delegation to Constantine to offer his congratulations to the latter's accession as sole ruler in 324 C.E. It remains doubtful whether the flight of Prince Hormisdas to Rome at an undetermined time, between 313 and 324 C.E., could have prompted Šābuhr II's sending off a delegation to reiterate the *status quo*, in return for assurances by Constantine not to interfere in Persian affairs by using Prince Hormisdas as a potential rival king to Šābuhr II.²⁹

In the year 336 C.E., Šābuhr II, upon being refused peaceful negotiations regarding the terms of the Nisibis treaty by Constantine, declared war on Rome by invading Armenia, launching forays into Mesopotamia, and besieging the city of Nisibis.³⁰ The task of warding off the Persian aggression fell to Constantine's son and successor in the East, Constantius II, as Constantine died in the midst of a planned Persian campaign.

During the reign of Constantius II, which lasted until the year 361 C.E., no decisive advantage was gained by either side, despite considerable losses.³¹ It was only with the advent of Julian the Apostate in 361 C.E. and his ill-fated campaign against the Sasanian empire, in which, in spite of initial successes, Julian fell, that Šābuhr II could force the newly elected Roman emperor Jovian to accept the long-sought territorial reparations. Jovian, eager to return his legions home, consented to the king's pressing demands.³²

3. Classical Sources and Sasanian Epigraphy

No doubt should remain as to the motivation of Šābuhr II's Roman wars, namely, as an unremitting endeavor to regain control over territories lost by his forebear Narseh. However, a notice by Ammianus Marcellinus,³³ reporting among others on the content of a letter allegedly sent by Šābuhr II to Constantine's successor in

the East, Constantius II, has given some credence to the notion of Achaemenid reminiscences under the early Sasanians. In the letter, the Sasanian emperor demanded the return of territories formerly belonging to the Achaemenids, hence of an extent surpassing the losses suffered by Narseh.³⁴

Ammianus' relation seems to echo the accounts written by Cassius Dio³⁵ and Herodian³⁶ over a century before, who, describing the political motivations of Ardaxšīr's equally belligerent posture towards Rome, would cite the desire to recover former Achaemenid lands as the cause of Sasanian incursions into Mesopotamia and Syria. Thus, in order to investigate Ammianus' report on Šābuhr II's rationale behind his Roman wars, one ought simultaneously to take into account the relations of Dio and Herodian on the causes of Sasanian forays into Roman Mesopotamia and Syria in the third century C.E. This has been done a number of times in the recent past; indeed, the issue of Achaemenid reception in the early Sasanian empire constitutes one of the most discussed topics in ancient Iranian history,³⁷ and once more the main arguments will be surveyed briefly before an alternate solution is proposed.

Until recently, scholarship was evenly divided between two camps: those who regarded the evidence of our classical sources as an *interpretatio romana*,³⁸ which, in face of Persian incursions into Roman territories, had afforded the Sasanians with a historical past to account for their aggressive behavior;³⁹ and those who believed in Achaemenid reminiscences under early Sasanians,⁴⁰ mainly because a passage of Šābuhr I's *res gestae* at the *Ka'be-ye Zardošt* seemed to entail a tacit reference to the Achaemenid precursors.

More recently, however, the pendulum seems to have shifted towards a third tendency,⁴¹ which ascribes a certain degree of historical awareness to the Sasanians, but one that is rooted in the Iranian mythical and epic tradition, rather than in the concrete *historical* possession of things past.⁴² As a result, former opponents now seem to agree that Sasanians more probably alluded to their epic Kayānid forebears, rather than to their Achaemenid ancestors, when they referred to their predecessors.⁴³

But before continuing the discussion of the scholarship, the accounts of the primary sources will be presented and examined following a brief description of their content and historical value.

Cassius Dio, in the last book of his *Roman History*,⁴⁴ reported in the epitome of Xiphilinos, gives his views on the eastern danger threatening the Roman empire while alluding to Ardashīr I's forays into Mesopotamia and Syria. The reason for the Sasanian king's aggressiveness is described as the desire to conquer all which was held by the ancient Persians (οἱ πάλαι Πέρσαι), whom Ardashīr regarded as his forebears (οἱ προγόνου).

Herodian, in two passages of his *History*,⁴⁵ knows of elaborate Sasanian claims to Roman territories, which in the past had belonged to their Achaemenid ancestors, whom they knew by name: be it Cyrus, or be it "Darius (III) the last king of the Persians" (Δαρεῖος ὁ τελευταῖος Περσῶν βασιλεύς). Unlike Dio's account of Ardashīr's campaigns, which may have drawn upon official reports,⁴⁶ and Dio's own observations,⁴⁷ Herodian's account, composed with the knowledge of Šābuhr I's repeated offensives,⁴⁸ was neither an independent narrative of Ardashīr's campaigns nor a substantial expansion of Dio's account, upon which it drew for its core tenets, as now once more conclusively established by Martin Zimmermann.⁴⁹ And, whenever Herodian, at least in the description of Alexander Severus' defensive campaign against the Sasanians, was deprived of Dio's *Vorlage*, he seems to have had recourse to little reliable oral traditions circulating within the empire.⁵⁰

Ammianus Marcellinus is yet another classical author who reported on Achaemenid reminiscences in the early empire.⁵¹ He describes the causes of King Šābuhr II's Persian offensives, almost a century after Šābuhr I's Roman wars, in the context of a letter allegedly sent by the Persian king to Constantius II. Although Ammianus Marcellinus' sources for this episode are not well known,⁵² the extent of Šābuhr II's territorial claim (*usque Strymona flumen et Macedonicos fines*), which differs from the accounts of Cassius Dio and Herodian, has been regarded as indicating an independent source.⁵³

However, a comparative look at the reports of Cassius Dio, Herodian, and Ammianus on the impulses behind the belligerent behavior of Ardashīr I and Šābuhr II discloses such strong similarities in structure and phraseology that to account for them one has either to assume that at worst Herodian and Ammianus drew upon Dio's report; or at best Dio and Ammianus shared literary *topoi* responsible for the striking paral-

els in their narratives.⁵⁴ Ammianus' letter will be explored in some detail below, but first the bare reports:

Cassius Dio 80.3.4

οὗτος οὖν φοβερός ἡμῖν ἐγένετο στρατεύματι τε πολλῷ οὐ μόνον τῇ Μεσοποταμίᾳ ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ Συρίᾳ ἐφεδρεύσας καὶ ἀπειλῶν ἀνακτῆσεσθαι πάντα ὥς καὶ προσήκοντά οἱ ἐκ προγόνων ὅσα ποτὲ οἱ πάλαι Πέρσαι μέχρι τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς θαλάσσης ἔσχον.

"Consequently, he [Artaxerxes] generated a cause of fear for us, for he was encamped with a large army waiting to attack not only Mesopotamia, but also Syria, menacing to recover all that the ancient Persians had once held as far as the Greek Sea, on the grounds that all this belonged to him by the virtue of his ancestors."

Herodian 6.2.1–2

Μεσοποταμίαν τε κατατρέχει καὶ Σύροις ἀπελεῖ πᾶσαν τε τὴν ἀντικειμένην ἡπειρον Εὐρώπῃ καὶ διαιρουμένην Αἰγαίῳ τε καὶ τῷ πορθμῷ τῆς Προποντίδος Ἀσίαν τε πᾶσαν καλουμένην προγονικὸν κτῆμα ἡγούμενος τῇ Περσῶν ἀρχῇ ἀνακτῆσασθαι βούλεται φάσκων ἀπὸ Κύρου τοῦ πρώτου τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐκ Μήδων ἐς Πέρσας μεταστήσαντος μέχρι Δαρείου τοῦ τελευταίου Περσῶν βασιλέως οὗ τὴν ἀρχὴν Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μακεδὼν καθεῖλε πάντα μέχρις Ἰωνίας καὶ Καρίας ὑπὸ σατραπαις Περσικοῖς διφκῆσθαι· προσήκειν οὖν αὐτῷ Πέρσαις ἀνανεώσασθαι πᾶσαν ὁλόκληρον ἢ πρότερον ἔσχον ἀρχὴν.

"He ravaged Mesopotamia and threatened Syria. He intended to recover for Persia the entire land facing Europe, separated by the Aegean Sea and the Propontis [Sea of Marmara], all of which is called Asia [Minor], and which he believed to be his ancestral possession, affirming that from the time of Cyrus, who was the first to transfer the rule from the Medes to the Persians, up to Dareios [III], the last of the Persian kings, whose dominion Alexander, the Macedonian, had destroyed, the whole land, as far as Ionia and Caria, had been administered by Persian satraps. It was proper that he renew this empire wholly and entirely for the Persians, as they had once held it."

Ammianus Marcellinus 17.5.5–6

ad usque Strymona flumen et Macedonicos fines tenuisse maiores imperium meos, antiquitates quoque vestrae testantur; haec me convenit flagitare (ne sit arrogans quod affirmo) splendore virtutumque insignium serie, vetustis regibus

antistantem. Sed ubique mihi cordi est recta ratio, cui coalitus ab adulescentia prima, nihil umquam paenitendum admisi. Ideoque Armeniam recuperare cum Mesopotamia debeo, avo meo composita fraude praereptam. Illud apud nos numquam in acceptum feretur, quod asseritis vos exsultantes, nullo discrimine virtutis ac doli, prosperos omnes laudari debere bellorum eventus.

"That my forefathers' empire reached as far as the river Strymon and the boundaries of Macedonia even your own ancient records bear witness. These lands it is fitting that I should demand, since (and may what I say not seem arrogant) I surpass the kings of old in magnificence and array of conspicuous virtues. But at all times right reason is dear to me, and, trained in it from my earliest youth, I have never allowed myself to do anything which I had cause to repent. Thus, I am bound to recover Armenia and Mesopotamia, which through fabricated deceit was wrested from my grandfather."

It is clear that in such circumstance much weight is given to a passage of Šābuhr's *res gestae*, in which King Šābuhr I recounts how he had settled Roman soldiers who had been made captive during their encounters in Non-Iran (*Anērān*), that is, outside of the boundaries of the empire, in Iran proper (*Ērānšahr*), in properties (*dastgerd*) that had belonged to the king's father, grandfathers, and predecessors:

ŠKZ, Pth., 15–16

*ud mardōhmag čē aš Frōmāyān šahr aš Anaryān pad āwār wāst andar Aryānšahr andar Pārs Pahlaw Xūzestān Asūrestān ud any šahr ō šahr kū amāh ud **pidar ud niyāgān ud hasēnagān** dastgerd būd ōd *nibast.*⁵⁵

"and the people who were from the Roman empire (We) led away from *Anērān* into *Ērānšahr*, (into) Persis, Parthia, Xūzestān, Asūrestān, and other various places where We, (**Our**) father, (**Our**) grandfathers and (**Our**) ancestors had properties, (and) there (We) settled (them)."

Now, whereas the Middle Iranian terms *pid* "father," *niyāg* "grandfather(s)," seem to refer to Šābuhr's own father, Ardaxšīr the *pid*, and to the early Sasanians, the *niyāg*, there is no consensus among scholars as whom the *ahēnag/hasēnag*,

"ancestor(s)" designates,⁵⁶ the Achaemenids or the epic Kayānids.

It is therefore clear that much of the argumentative scaffolding here rests on the identification of the terms *niyāg* and *ahēnag/hasēnag*. Both terms are found in other Sasanian inscriptions as well, notably, in the inscription of Narseh at Paikuli (NPi), but the occurrences have been considered too fragmented to be worthy of attention.⁵⁷ However, a more careful look may shed some light.

Indeed, in the Paikuli inscription, the sequence *pid ud niyāg* "father and ancestors" occurs frequently, wherein *pid* undoubtedly refers to the sovereign's father, in this case, Šābuhr I. But who is/are the *niyāg(s)*?

In a further fragmented passage of the Paikuli, in the context of a message sent as response to Narseh by the nobles and grandees of the realm, it is stated that it was appropriate for him to assume the throne of Erān, for the gods have given rulership to his family, that is, the family of Sāsān (*tōhm čē Sāsānagān*) and Ardaxšīr, who is Narseh's grandfather (*niyāg*):

NPi, f7,06–f13,06

*kū yad [y]azdān farrah ud šahr-xwadāyīf ō tōhm čē Sāsānagān dād [ud hawīn bayān **Ardaxšahr šāhān**] šāh kē-tān niyāg bawēd pad yazdān nām hamag šahr [. . .] kerd.*⁵⁸

"(but) because (ever) since (?) the gods gave glory and rulership to the family of Sāsān [and (ever since) His Majesty **Ardaxšīr?**], King [of **Kings?**], **who was your grandfather**, in the name of the gods had made the whole realm . . ."

The sequence *hawīn bayān Ardaxšahr šāhān* (*šāh*) before *kē-tān niyāg bawēd* is a conjecture proposed by P. O. Skjærvø, but it is difficult to find an alternate restoration.⁵⁹ Indeed, the term *šāh* is clearly attested after the name of the person whom the nobles and grandees reckoned to be Narseh's grandfather (*niyāg*). Since the eponymous founder *Sāsān* appears at the beginning of the passage as the family's primogenitor (*tōhm čē Sāsānagān*), he can not be identified with the *niyāg*, thus leaving two further possible candidates to fill in the gap: Narseh's grandfather *Ardaxšahr šāhān šāh* and great-grandfather *Pābag šāh*. By process of elimination, *Pābag šāh* has to be discarded, for, according to Šābuhr's *res gestae*, he did not carry the title *šāhān šāh* but

merely the title *šāh*.⁶⁰ Since the lacuna in Paikuli, however, is too large to have contained only the sequence *Pābag šāh*, the reading *Ardaxšahr šāhān šāh* has to be given preference.

Thus, here at least, *Ardaxšīr* must be a *niyāg*, but since the term is repeatedly used in plural, one must assume that it was attributed to other(s) as well. In the following, some attestations of the term *niyāg* are collected, which may elucidate its usage and attribution:

NPi, B1,03–B3–4,04

ud ka amā pad kerbagīh [ō handēmān hišt] hē(nd) ēg (a)z wispuhrān ud hargbed [ud wuzurg]ān [ud] āzādān frē[s]tag ō amā āmad kū šāhān šāh pad kerbagīh az Armin ōrōn ō Ērānšahr ēw wihēzēd ud farrah ud šahr ud xwēš gā[h ud] padixšar ī niyāgān az yazdān pad[īrift az] wad[gar ī yazdān ud] mardōm ēw [dārēd].

“And when We graciously [admitted?] them, then the messengers from the Princes and the Hargbed and the Grandees and the Nobles came to Us (saying) that: ‘May the king of kings graciously move from Armenia hither to Ērānšahr. And (as for) **the glory and the realm and His Own throne and honour**, which (His) **ancestors** received from the gods, may (He) [take them back from?] the evil[doers of/against] gods and men.’”

NPi, d3,04–E18,01

[ōy gāh kē pidar ud] niyāgān kē tō abēniyābag [. . . niš]ast hē [. . .].

“[**that throne of your father and] ancestors** which you in unfitting manner have sat [upon . . .]”

NPi, G6,06–G13,06

[ēg pad x]wēš gāh ud padix[šar ī] pidar ud [niyā]gān ēstēd kū [. . . Ērān]šahr tis gām rā[st . . .] (ud) askādar (Pth.) [hād].

“[therefore (do now)] ascend **Your throne and (receive) the honour(s) [of] (your) father and ancestors**, so that [henceforth . . . in Ērān?]šahr things . . . [will be more?] righteous(?) [. . .] and higher.”

Šābuhr, Sagān šāh, Ps. I, 9–11

u-š wuzurg šādīh kerd u-š yazdān kerdagān framād kerdan u-š [p]idar ud niyāgān āfrīn kerd u-š Šābuhr šāhān šāh āfrīn kerd u-š xwēš āfrīn kerd ōy-iz āfrīn kerd kē ēn mām kerd.

“And he (= Šābuhr Sagān šāh) made a big celebration, and he ordered services for the gods, and he

prayed for **his father and ancestors**, for Šābuhr, King of Kings, for himself, also for the one who made this dwelling.”

As these passages bear witness, *niyāg*, in most occurrences, is preceded by the term *pid* “father,” and they are both overwhelmingly associated with the insignia of sovereignty, e.g., *gāh* “throne,” *šahr* “realm,” *padixšar* “honour,” and *farrah* “glory.”

In order to determine who the other *niyāg*(s) are, apart from *Ardaxšīr*, one must first examine the occurrences of the term *ahēnag/hasēnag*; aside from the aforementioned passage of Šābuhr’s *res gestae* alluded to above, the term *ahēnag/hasēnag* occurs in three other passages in the Paikuli inscription, of which only one is relatively unequivocal:

NPi, 35G6,01–32f6,02

*agar-in hasēnag andar tōh[m . . .] kerd ud *šāyād ahēndē, ašyān-iž aš amāh xwēbēh [. . . pad pušt čē] yazdān wehkārīf čē Aryānšahr.*

“if **Our forebear in the family** (?) [. . .] had made [. . .] and had ruled (?), then also We from Our own [. . . with the of] the gods, the well-being of Ērānšahr.”

Here, *ahēnag/hasēnag* is used with the term *tōm/tōhm* “family, seed,” which was seen above in *tōhm čē Sāsānagān* “the family of Sāsān.” The fact that, on the one hand, the family’s origin is attributed to Sāsān and, on the other hand, the Paikuli inscription mentions a forebear in the family who is neither identical with *Ardaxšīr*, the *niyāg*, nor with Šābuhr I, the *pid*, it stands to reason to infer that *ahēnag/hasēnag* may refer to the family’s founder Sāsān himself. However, can it be ruled out with certainty that *ahēnag/hasēnag* did not designate other(s) as well, such as *Pābag šāh*, or even *Pābag*’s other (older?) son, who briefly ruled before the accession of his brother *Ardaxšīr* I, namely, *Šābuhr šāh*?⁶¹ Now, recall that the terms *ahēnag/hasēnag* and *niyāg* were both used in the plural in Šābuhr’s *res gestae*, so that presumably other(s) responded to the appellation of *ahēnag/hasēnag*, aside from Sāsān, and to that of *niyāg*, aside from *Ardaxšīr*. Furthermore, it has been established above that *niyāg* and *pid* in the majority of their occurrences are linked with the paraphernalia of sovereignty, such as *gāh* “throne” (*gāh ud padixšar ī pidar ud niyāgān*). Thus, it is likely that the term *niyāg*

referred to the first Sasanian rulers who assumed the regal throne in Persis, that is, apart from Ardashīr, Šābuhr šāh, and Pābag šāh.

Consequently, the *ahēnag/hasēnag* could designate those members of the Sasanian family (*tōm/tōhm*) who ruled in Persis (as petty rulers?) prior to the rise of the Sasanians to royal dignity, such as the patronym Sāsān, whose rank is attested by Šābuhr's *res gestae* as that of a *xwadāy/xwadāw* "lord." Since Sāsān is not explicitly mentioned in Šābuhr's inscription as Pābag's father, it is probable that the reason for his citation at the top of the list of Šābuhr I's predecessors had less to do with him being the immediate precursor of Pābag šāh than with him being the eponymous founder of the dynasty.

Accordingly, *ahēnag/hasēnag* possibly referred to Sāsān himself, as well as to those forgotten (or legendary?) Sasanian lords *xwadāy/xwadāw* who succeeded Sāsān *xwadāw* prior to the rise of Pābag šāh. In short, the terms *niyāg* and *ahēnag/hasēnag* both probably referred to Sasanian immediate ancestors, but they distinguished between those who held the royal dignity and those who did not.

Hence, in the discourse of Narseh in NPī, *pid*, *niyāg*, and *ahēnag/hasēnag* probably referred to Šābuhr I (*pid*), Ardashīr plus Šābuhr šāh plus Pābag šāh (*niyāg*), and Sāsān (*hasēnag*) respectively; and in the narrative of Šābuhr I in ŠKZ, to Ardashīr (*pid*), Šābuhr šāh plus Pābag šāh (*niyāg*), and Sāsān plus the unknown *xwadāy/xwadāw* "lords" (*ahēnag/hasēnag*).

Additional support for the use of *niyāg* and *ahēnag/hasēnag* as designations of ancestors and forebears within a *single dynasty* is provided by parallels in the Old Persian epigraphy. The term *niyāg* seems to correspond to both Old Persian (OP) *niyāka*- "grandfather," from which it is derived, and OP *apanayāka*- "great(-great)-grandfather." In the Old Persian version of Darius I's inscription at Susa (DSf), *niyāka*- refers to Darius' grandfather Arsames (Aršāma-):

DSf, 12–15

vašnā A^huramazdāha haya ma[nā] pitā Vištāspa utā Aršāma haya manā [ni]yāka avā ubā ajīvatam yadiy A^huramazdā mām xšāyaθiyam akunauš ahayāyā būmiyā

"by the greatness of Ahuramazda my father Hystaspes and **my grandfather Arsames** were both alive when Ahuramazda made me king over this earth."

In a late inscription of Artaxerxes II (404–359; A²Sa),⁶² composed on the occasion of the restoration of an ancestral palace, wherein the king provides a lengthy genealogy, it is possible to observe precisely the distribution of the terms *niyāka*- (*nayāka*-) and *apanayāka*- (< **apa-niayāka*-):

A²Sa, 1–5

θātiy Artaxšačā Xš vazārka Xš Xšyānām Xš DHyūnām Xš ahayāyā BUyā Dārayavaušahayā Xšhāyā puça Dārayavaušahayā Artaxšač[ā]hāyā puça Artaxšačāhāyā Xšayārcāhāyā Xšhāyā puça Xšayārcāhāyā Dārayavaušahayā Xšhāyā puça Dārayavaušahayā Vištāspahayā puça Haxāmanāšiya

*imam apadāna Dārayavauš apanayākama akunauš abayapara upa Artaxšačā nayakama aθava [vaš]nā AM [Anahā]ta utā Miθra adam nastāya apadānā imam akunaiy AM Anahāta utā Miθra mā[m pātu]v [hacā] vi[sp]ā gastā utā imam taya akunā mā yātum mā kayadā vi[nāθ]itu[v]*⁶³

"Says Artaxerxes the great king, king of kings, king of the countries, king of this earth, son of Darius the king, of Darius (who was) the son of Artaxerxes the king, of Artaxerxes (who was) the son of Xerxes the king, of Xerxes (who was) the son of Darius the king, of Darius (who was) the son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenid.

This palace **Darius my great-grandfather** made, later, under **Artaxerxes my grandfather**, it burnt; by the greatness of Ahuramazda, Anahita, and Mithra I ordered this palace to be done. May Ahuramazda and Anahita and Mithra protect me from all evil, as well as what I have done; let not the sorcerer, nor the astrologer destroy(?) (it)."

Artaxerxes II mentions four kings who preceded him: his father Darius II; his grandfather Artaxerxes I, the *niyāka*- (*nayāka*-); his great-grandfather Xerxes; and his great-great-grandfather Darius I, the *apanayāka*-; conceivably Xerxes was also called *apanayāka*-, as probably all forebears beyond the third generation were. Particularly revealing in this inscription is the fact that the Achaemenids used the same term as the Sasanians to designate their ancestors,

but whereas the Achaemenids distinguished between grandfather *niyāka* and great(-great)-grandfather(s) *apanayāka*-, the Sasanians used the same term (*niyāg*) to designate both, and whereas the Sasanians called their eponymous forebear *ahēnag/hasēnag*, the Achaemenids called theirs merely by name: *Haxāmaniš*. In spite of these differences, the fact remains that *niyāg* corresponded to both *niyāka*- and *apanayāka*-, but *ahēnag/hasēnag* always to *apanayāka*-.

A *tertium comparationis* is provided by the recently published Rabatak inscription of the Kušān king Kaniška that dates to the first half of the second century.⁶⁴

Therein, Kaniška mentions his immediate forebears, that is, his father, the *πιδά*; his grandfather, the *νιαγο* (< *niyāka*-); and his great-grandfather, the *φρο-νιαγο* (< **fra-niyāka*-):⁶⁵

Rabatak Inscription 12–14

για φρομαδο αβειμοανο βαονανο κινδι αβο κοζουλο
καδφισο βαο αβο ι φρονιαγο (ο)δο α(βο ο)σημο (τ)ακτοο
βαο α(β)(ο) ι νια(γ)ο οδο αβο οσημο καδφισο βαο αβο (ι)
πιδά οδο αβο ι χοβσο αβο κανηκο βαο.

“he gave orders to make (them) for these kings:
for King Kujula Kadphises (his) great-grandfather,
and for King Vima Taktu (his) grandfather, and
for King Vima Kadphises (his) father; and also for
himself, King Kanishka.”

The Bactrian terms for grand- and great-grandfather, which had not been attested before in Bactrian,⁶⁶ show a distribution similar to the other two epigraphic corpora: whereas the *νιαγο* refers to the grandfather, the *φρονιαγο* alludes to the forebear in the third generation, but still within the very same dynasty.

Intriguingly, as shown persuasively by Joe Cribb,⁶⁷ King Kujula Kadphises (βαο κοζουλο καδφισο), the *φρονιαγο* “great-grandfather,” who in the context of the Rabatak inscription is presented as the father of King Vima Taktu (βαο οσημο τακτοο), the *νιαγο* “grandfather,” seems to have been referred to with the mere eponym *Kušān* in several inscriptions.⁶⁸ Indeed, Vima Taktu is called *Kuṣānaputro*, “son of Kušān,”⁶⁹ notably, in the inscription of Vima on the sculpture of Māt, which is Vima’s inscription placed between the feet of a seated giant royal figure, near the village of Māt.⁷⁰ Thus, what the Bactrian evidence and the Sasanian epigraphy have

in common is the mention of their respective eponymous dynastic founders—*Kušān* here, and *Sāsān* there—as forebears, that is, *φρονιαγο*, and *ahēnag/hasēnag*.

We may conclude that not only the Sasanian evidence but also the comparison with other epigraphic corpora do not support the notion that the term *ahēnag/hasēnag* may have ever alluded to an historical dynasty other than the Sasanians, such as the Achaemenids, or to any epic predecessors such as the Kayānids but, in concert with the semantic field of the terms *apanayāka*- and *φρονιαγο*, always to the immediate ancestors within the same dynasty, from the third generation past, up to and including the eponymous ancestor but never farther than that.

Thus, nothing in the Sasanian inscriptions supports the view that *ahēnag/hasēnag* referred to the Achaemenids or the Kayānids. Still another point makes the equation of *ahēnag/hasēnag* with the Achaemenids unlikely. If, as Gnoli seems to suggest, Šābuhr I referred to the Achaemenids in his *res gestae* in order to sustain the legitimacy of his claims over newly conquered territories, then one would expect the term *ahēnag/hasēnag*, if a reference to the Achaemenids, to be used in conjunction with *Anērān*. The reference to the Achaemenids is only useful as an ideological rationale for demanding the restoration of formerly Achaemenid territories that were either not under Sasanian dominion or contested by the Romans, both of which were classified as *Anērān*. Šābuhr I, however, when describing the re-settlement of Roman prisoners of war, clearly indicates that they were carried from Non-Iran (*Anērān*), where they were taken captive, into possessions (*dastgerd*) held by Šābuhr’s father (*pid*), ancestors (*niyāg*), and forebears (*ahēnag/hasēnag*) in Iran proper (*Ērānšahr*): *mardōhmag čē až Frōmāyān šahr až Anaryān pad āwār wāst andar Aryānšahr . . . kū amāh ud pidar ud niyāgān ud hasēnagān dastgerd būd ōδ *nibāst* “and the people who were from the Roman empire, (We) led away from *Anērān* into *Ērānšahr* . . . where We, (Our) father, (Our) ancestors and (Our) forebears had possessions, there (We) settled (them).” There is clearly no merit in the Sasanians referring to their remote ancestors, the Achaemenids, to justify their ancestral rights over territories that already belonged to them, a fact not even the Romans dis-

puted.⁷¹ We must, therefore, conclude that the term *ahēnag/hasēnag* did *not* refer to the Achaemenids but probably to the first member(s) of the Sasanian dynasty who held estates in some of the territories which under Ardaxšīr's rule were to constitute *Ērānšahr*.

4. The *imitatio*

Thus, if indeed the Iranian evidence does not corroborate the tenor of our classical sources, ought we then to infer that their reports on Achaemenid reminiscences were all but an *interpretatio romana*? The addition of yet another account, namely Tacitus' relation regarding the territorial claims of the Arsacid king Ardawān II, whose narrative structure closely resembles the later reports of Dio and Ammianus, may strongly suggest that we are dealing with mere literary *topoi*, as far as the Achaemenid claims of Sasanian kings are concerned:

Tacitus, *Annales* 6.31

simul **veteres Persorum ac Macedonum terminos** seque invasurum possessa primum **Cyro** et post **Alexandro** per vaniloquentiam ac minas iaciebat "at the same time he [Artabanos] threw vain talk and menaces with respect to the old boundaries of **the Persians and the Macedonians**, and that he will seize what was held first by **Cyrus** and afterwards by **Alexander**."

Cassius Dio 80.3.4

καὶ ἀπειλῶν ἀνακτῆσεσθαι πάντα ὡς καὶ προσήκοντά οἱ ἐκ **προγόνων** ὅσα ποτὲ **οἱ πάλοι Πέρσαι** **μέχρι** τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς θαλάσσης ἔσχον

"... he (was) menacing to recover all that **the ancient Persians** had once held as far as the **Greek Sea**, on the grounds that all this belonged to him through his **ancestors**."

Ammianus Marcellinus 17.5.5

ad usque Strymona flumen et Macedonicos fines tenuisse **maiores imperium meos** antiquitates quoque vestrae testantur haec me convenit flagitare... splendore virtutumque insignium serie **vetustis regibus** antistantem "that **my forefathers' empire** reached as far as the river Strymon and the boundaries of Macedonia

even your own ancient records bear witness; these lands it is fitting that I should demand, since... I surpass **the kings of old** in magnificence and array of conspicuous virtues."

In this well-known passage,⁷² Tacitus reports that, following the death of the Armenian king in 35 C.E., Ardawān II placed his son Aršak (*Arsaces*) on the vacant throne of Armenia, confident that Tiberius, the Roman Caesar, would not interfere in the Armenian affairs because of his advanced age. It is noteworthy that Tacitus derives Ardawān II's territorial claim from both the Achaemenid and Macedonian empires, whose founders, Cyrus and Alexander, are explicitly mentioned.

In contrast, Dio and Ammianus refer solely to the Achaemenid empire, describing its confines as the Greek Sea (**μέχρι τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς θαλάσσης**) and the boundaries of Macedonia (*Macedonicos fines*). The fundamental difference between the three accounts lies in the fact that in Tacitus' account, the Arsacid, Ardawān II, legitimizes his claim to disputed Roman territories by indiscriminately associating himself with Alexander and the Macedonians, that is, the Seleucids, Alexander's heirs in Iran, as well as with Cyrus and the Achaemenids, the representatives of "Iranism" proper.⁷³ In contrast, in the relations of Dio, Herodian, and Ammianus about Ardaxšīr I and Šābuhr II, the short-lived Macedonian and the following Seleucid empires are not mentioned.

The embrace of Alexander and the Seleucids by the Parthians in Tacitus' account (and the similarities it exhibits with the reports of Dio and Ammianus) may be regarded as a token of the report's fictitious nature, for, as the evidence of the Middle Persian Zoroastrian writings in which Alexander is vilified⁷⁴ clearly shows, no Sasanian sovereign would have associated himself with Alexander.⁷⁵ However, quite to the contrary, there is good reason to believe that the Arsacids, unlike the Sasanians, consciously associated themselves with the Hellenistic world,⁷⁶ as, having put an end to its political reality, they also inherited its colons and cities, whose allegiance they sought. Other accounts, notably, by Strabo⁷⁷ and Syncellus,⁷⁸ attest to the Arsacids' binary referral to both the Achaemenid and Hellenistic past.⁷⁹ What is more, a direct precedence for this dual referral may also be observed in the political

ideology of the Greco-Iranian Pontic king, Mithridates Eupator,⁸⁰ whose tenets, crafted during the long struggle he led against Rome in the first half of the first century B.C.E., may have inspired the Arsacid policy as well:

Justin 38.7.1

*se autem seu nobilitate illis conparetur clarior illa conluvie convenarum esse qui paternos maiores suos a **Cyro Darioque conditoribus Persici regni maternos a magno Alexandro ac Nicatore Seleuco conditoribus imperii macedonici** referat . . .*

"as to him [Mithridates], if he were to compare his nobility with them [the Romans], he is more illustrious than that rabble that has come together [from everywhere], he, who traces back his ancestors on his father's side to **Cyrus and Darius, the founders of the Persian empire**, and on his mother's side, to **Alexander the Great and Seleukos Nicator, the founders of the Macedonian empire . . .**"

Consequently, the presence of Alexander in the account of Tacitus, but also his absence from those of Dio and Ammianus, may indicate that there is more to the notion of Achaemenid claims than mere literary *topoi*.

The Alexander reception in Rome provides some clues as to the veracity of the Achaemenid reminiscences among the Sasanians. We first can observe an Alexander emulation, or *imitatio Alexandri*, among the powerful *triumviri* of the late *res publica*, namely, Pompeius, Caesar, and Crassus,⁸¹ an *imitatio* that follows upon Roman expansion into Asia Minor and Mesopotamia in the aftermath of the Seleucid polity's demise in Syria and Rome's encounter with the Arsacid realm.

When Augustus initiated a new eastern policy by renouncing the aggressive stance of his predecessors, it led to the treaty of 20 B.C.E. between Rome and the Arsacid empire, in which the Euphrates was recognized as the border between the two empires.⁸² The ideological foundation for this renunciation rested on the definition of the Arsacid realm as an *alter orbis*, a degenerate parallel world, whose conquest was undesirable for Rome.⁸³ The Augustan conception of the *divisio orbis*,⁸⁴ or the division of the world, was fundamentally at odds with the *imitatio Alexandri* and its inevitable call for eastern conquest.⁸⁵ But despite the long-lasting effects of the Augustan

policy, the powerful Alexander image continued to serve in the *Principate* and the *Dominate* as the ideological underpinning of large-scale offensives launched against the Arsacid and Sasanian empires.

Certainly Trajan,⁸⁶ furthermore Caracalla and Alexander Severus among the Syrian Severan *augusti*⁸⁷ and Julian in the Constantinian dynasty,⁸⁸ are very much associated with the phenomenon of the *imitatio Alexandri*. Now, one may wonder what bearing the Alexander emulation had on the Achaemenid reminiscences in Iran, even if it were merely to provide a literary or ideological justification for Roman political actions. Here, one should recall that in order to complete the cycle of the *imitatio*, one is forced also to resuscitate Alexander's former foes. All this leads one to ask whether Achaemenid reminiscences ascribed to the Sasanians by the classical authors are not a reflection of Roman ideological manipulations, rather than the imprint of a bygone reality. Indeed, one may believe that while propagating the image of a Roman emperor as a *novus Alexander*, Roman propaganda also resurrected the image of Alexander's former formidable adversaries, the Achaemenids, in order to complete the cycle of the *imitatio*.⁸⁹ Hence, the portrayal of the Sasanians as heirs to the Achaemenids could have existed only as an intrinsic part of the Roman *imitatio*, which sought not only to prove the historical continuity of the Greco-Roman world by vindicating Alexander's legacy but also to bestow a similar perception of permanence upon the history of Iran by depicting the Sasanians as cognizant heirs of the Achaemenids. This projection of continuity onto the history of Iran was not purposeless; inasmuch as one side of the *imitatio* was about the *exaltation of the Roman emperor* by equating him with *Alexander*, the other side was about the *debasement of the adversary* by associating him with the *vanquished Achaemenids*.

It is telling that our two most trusted sources reporting on the Sasanians' Achaemenid claims, Dio and Ammianus, were composed in the immediate aftermath of periods of intense *Alexandrophilia* (at least in literary circles) in Rome, and both authors were in the close entourage of emperors of whom the *imitatio* is reported, namely Alexander Severus and Julian. Thus, one may surmise that the claims by Ardaxšīr and Šābuhr II to former Achaemenid territories were

in fact Roman constructs owing to the exigencies of the *imitatio*.

However, before one may safely embrace this conclusion, Šābuhr II's letter to Constantius II should be considered again. Indeed, various elements in the letter ascribed to Šābuhr II seem to reflect an Iranian tradition, for they represent some similarities with expressions encountered in royal Iranian inscriptions,⁹⁰ similarities, which if substantiated, could confer some measure of authenticity to Ammianus' report.⁹¹

5. Once More Šābuhr II's Letter

Looking at the similarities Ammianus' letter exhibits with royal Iranian inscriptions, one may observe that Šābuhr II's description of his personal virtues can be compared with King Darius I's self-portrayal in his inscription at Naqš-e Rostam (DNb).⁹²

Šābuhr II's alleged confession that right reason (*recta ratio*) is dear to him coincides remarkably with Darius' statement that he strives only for what is right (*taya rāstam*). Also, when, according to Ammianus, Šābuhr II states that he has never committed an act he had reason to regret (*nihil umquam paenitendum admisi*), he clearly means he is very much in control of himself and hence possesses supreme confidence in his actions, which recalls Darius' assertion that he is in full control of himself by virtue of his mental force (*manahā* ^{huvaipaišiyahayā} *xšayamna a^hmiy*):

*sed ubique mihi cordi est recta ratio*⁹³ *cui coalitus ab adulescentia prima nihil umquam paenitendum admisi*

"but at all times right (straight) reason is dear to me, and trained in it from my earliest youth, I have never allowed myself to do anything which I had cause to repent."

DNb, 11–12, 13–15

taya (rā)stam *ava mām kāma* . . .

[*yac*](i)-mai^y [*p*]artanayā *bavatiy dāršam dā(r)ayāmiy (ma)na[h]ā* ^{huvaipai[š]iyahayā} *dārša[m]* *xšayamna a^hmiy*

"what is right (straight) is my desire . . ."

"whatever happens to me in a fight, I hold on, by dint of (my) mind I am strongly in control of myself."

Another striking similarity is between the reasons asserted by Šābuhr I before launching his second campaign and those advanced by Šābuhr II to justify his demands over Armenia and Mesopotamia, which, according to Ammianus, Šābuhr II claimed were wrested from his grandfather (*avus*).⁹⁴ Šābuhr I's denunciation of the Roman Caesar as *deceitful*, that is, given to deceit (Pth. *drōy*/MP. *drō*) with respect to the Armenian question is indeed comparable to the wrong of which Šābuhr II accuses the Romans in his claim over Armenia and Mesopotamia: he blames them of having seized these territories through deceit (*fraus*):

ŠKZ, Pth., 4–5

ud Kēsar bid druxt (drōžad) ō Armin winās kerd
[*ud amāh*] *abar Frōmāyān šahr wihišt ahēm*

"and the Caesar lied again, he did wrong to Armenia, and We moved into the Roman empire."

Ideoque Armeniam recuperare cum Mesopotamia debeo *avo meo composita fraude praereptam*

"thus, I am bound to recover Armenia and Mesopotamia, which through fabricated deceit was wrested from my grandfather."

The accusation of deceit is followed by a fundamental distinction between the concept of *good* and *evil* among Romans and Persians. More specifically, Romans are denounced for their approval of all successful outcomes of war without distinguishing rectitude from deceit (*nullo discrimine virtutis ac doli*), that is, without any concern for the cause of the war, whether it arose from an evil act or not. Thus, Šābuhr II seems to blame the Romans for not making a distinction—inherent in his own moral conceptions—between good, rendered by *virtus*, and evil, expressed by *dolus*, a deficiency that would never find acceptance among his Persians (*illud apud nos numquam acceptum feretur*).⁹⁵

The well-known distinction between good and evil, which dominates Iranian moral conceptions, is also reflected in Dareios' inscription at Naqš-e Rostam, with which we may compare Šābuhr II's allegation:

Illud apud nos numquam in acceptum feretur quod asseritis vos exsultantes nullo discrimine

virtutis ac doli prosperos omnes laudari debere bellorum eventus

"That (view) shall never be brought to acceptance among us which you exultantly maintain, that **without distinction between virtue and deceit** all successful outcomes of war should be praised."

DNb, 6–8

av(ā)karam a^hmiy taya rāstam dau[št]ā a^hmiy miθa na[i]jy dauštā a^hmiy.

"I am thus made that **I am friend to right and not friend to wrong.**"

Although there is good reason to believe that the letter attributed to Šābuhr II is partly based upon genuine Iranian material, there is also good reason to believe that the limits allegedly vindicated by Šābuhr II, i.e., the river Strymon and the boundaries of Macedonia (*ad usque Strymona flumen et Macedonicos fines*), are merely literary fabrication.⁹⁶ The only territories that Šābuhr II revendicates from Rome in his letter to Constantius are Mesopotamia and Armenia, which are the territories lost by his grandfather Narseh, a fact that is further corroborated by Constantius' response to Šābuhr II: *Mesopotamiam poscis ut tuam perindeque Armeniam* "you request Mesopotamia as your own, just as Armenia," without any reference to the river Strymon and the boundaries of Macedonia.⁹⁷

Another, albeit hypothetical, possibility is assuming that while the link between the Achaemenids and the Sasanians was forged in order to complete the cycle of the *imitatio*, by the time of Šābuhr II's reign the Persians may have learned to assimilate this originally Roman *rationale* of their own deeds and begun to use it against Rome to their own advantage. The military successes of Šābuhr II and his victories over the Romans, especially under Julian, may have strengthened the idea that the Persians were heirs to the Achaemenids but *not* in the sense the *imitatio* would have required, namely as a new, worthy Oriental adversary to be conquered by a new Alexander, but such as Xerxes demanding the submission of Athens, as an Oriental aggressor reclaiming that which was his.⁹⁸

In that sense the parallels between Šābuhr II's letter and Iranian inscriptions could have an alternate meaning, and may indicate the awak-

ening of the Sasanians to their past, by dint of Roman propaganda.

Notes

1. See Enßlin 1942, 4–54; Klein 1977, 185–86; Barceló 1981, 74; and Bleckmann 1992, 141–47; Blockley 1992, 9; Mosig-Walburg 2002, 330.

2. See Blockley 1984, 28–34; Blockley 1992, 5–7; Winter 1988, 152–214; Winter and Dignas 2001, 48–51, 101–3, 144–55, 208–9.

3. I have refrained from a more detailed study of Šābuhr II's Roman wars, as any such attempt ought first to take into consideration Karin Mosig-Walburg's unpublished *Habilitationsschrift* entitled "Römer und Perser vom 3. Jahrhundert bis zum Jahr 363 n. Chr.," Frankfurt am Main, 2004, of which several articles have hitherto seen the light. See Mosig-Walburg 2007; Mosig-Walburg 2005a; Mosig-Walburg 2005b; Mosig-Walburg 2002; Mosig-Walburg 2000a; Mosig-Walburg 2000b; Mosig-Walburg 1999.

4. Spelled *šhpwhry* in Šābuhr II's inscription at Tāq-e Bustān (ŠTB, l. 2); *šhpwhly/šhpwhry* in the inscription of Šābuhr, king of Sagestān, at Persepolis (ŠPs. I, ll. 1; 10); and *šhpwhry/šhpwhly* and *šhpwly* in the inscription of (judge) Seleucos at Persepolis (ŠPs. II, ll. 5; 7; 8; 10).

5. Nöldeke 1879, 52, 64.

6. Zotenberg 1900, 512, 520.

7. Pellat 1962, 224, § 601.

8. Nöldeke 1879, 52, n. 1.

9. Gottwaldt 1848, 37–38.

10. Zotenberg 1900, 512, 520.

11. See Christensen 1971, 235, n. 2; Frye 1984, 309, n. 67.

12. Zosimus 2.27.1–27.4. See also Mosig-Walburg 2000a, 79–80.

13. Roberto 2005, 450–51, F 266; Müller and Müller 1851, 605, F 178. See also Dodgeon and Lieu 1991, 144, 148.

14. See Felix 1985, 128, no. 191; Mosig-Walburg 2000a, 78, 81–82.

15. Zonaras 13.5.19–33.

16. See Felix 1985, 129, no. 192; Dodgeon and Lieu 1991, 144, 149; Mosig-Walburg 2000a, 78–79.

17. See Mosig-Walburg 2000a, 82, 92.

18. See Back 1978, 492; Frye 1983, 132–33; Frye 1984, 308; Felix 1985, 191, no. 191; Dodgeon and Lieu 1991, 379, n. 2. Compare Azarnoush 1986, 223–29, and Mosig-Walburg 2000a, 81, n. 33.

19. ŠPs. I, ll. 4–6: . . . *az dar awēšān bayān namāz burd ud pad ēn rāh ī abar Staxr andar ō Sagestān šud ud pad kerbagih ēdar ō Sadstūn āmad u-š nān andar*

im xānag xward . . . “he (Šābur the Sagānšāh) took leave from the court of His Majesty, and went on this path from Staxr to Sagestān, and piously came hither, to Persepolis, he ate bread in this house . . .”

20. See Nöldeke 1879, 68, 69, n. 2; Bahar 1974, 918.
21. See Bedjan 1890, 333, 15. Also Assemanus 1748, 102, n. 7; Wiessner 1969, 206, n. 3. Compare Azar-noush 1986, 225–31.
22. See Nöldeke 1879, 53; Pellat 1962, § 601; Zotenberg 1900, 514.
23. Nöldeke 1879, 53–54, n. 3; 19, n. 4; and 55–58.
24. Nöldeke 1879, 53–58; Zotenberg 1900, 514–15, 517–21; Pellat 1962, § 602–4.
25. Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, I, 71; II, 126.
26. See Bellamy 1985, 31–49; Shahīd 1984, 31–47, 62–64, 66–68; and Kettenhofen 1995, 26–27.
27. Nöldeke 1879, 56; Zotenberg 1900, 519.
28. Barceló 1981, 74; Wirth 1978, 459–60.
29. See Mosig-Walburg 2000a, 85–90, 94–96. Compare Stallknecht 1969, 35; Barceló 1981, 74–75; Blockley, 1992, 9–10.
30. On the battle of Singara, see the detailed study of Mosig-Walburg 1999, 330–84.
31. On Constantius II's Persian wars, see Barceló 1981, 82–98; Blockley 1992, 12–24; Barceló 2004, 59–61. See also Mosig-Walburg 2002, 329–44.
32. On Julian's Persian wars, see Barceló 1981, 98–104; Bringmann 2004, 169–86; Rosen 2006, 333–74.
33. Ammianus Marcellinus 17.5.5–6.
34. See Barceló 1981, 89–91; Blockley 1992, 18–22; Mazza 2003, 416–19; Barceló 2004, 159–62.
35. Cassius Dio 80.3.4.
36. Herodianus 6.2.1–2.
37. For an excellent and thorough survey of the present debate with consideration of the older literature, see Kettenhofen 2002, 49–75; since its publication, the following works have seen the light: Shāhbāzi 2001, 61–73; Huyse 2002, 297–311; Daryaei 2002, 1–14; Wiesehöfer 2002a, 111–17; Wiesehöfer 2005a, 105–20; Wiesehöfer 2005b, 129–49; Daryaei 2006a, 493–503; Daryaei 2006b, 387–93; Dignas and Winter 2007, 61–62; also Shahīd 2004, 223–44; and Frendo 2002 [2006], 25–36.
38. Kettenhofen 1994, 102.
39. Foremost among the proponents of this school are Kettenhofen 1984, 177–90; Kettenhofen 1994, 99–108. Also Schoeler 1998, 373–92; Rubin 1998, 177–85; Rubin 2001, 646–47; For a discussion of the scholarly literature, see Kettenhofen 2002, 60–75.
40. Foremost among them, see Wiesehöfer 1982, 437–47; Wiesehöfer 1986, 177–86; Wiesehöfer 1994, 389–97; also Gnoli 1991, 57–63; Winter and Dignas 2001, 82–84; Dignas and Winter 2007, 81–82.
41. I discuss at length the issues pertinent to the equation of the *ahēnag* with the Kayanids in Shāyegan forthcoming.

42. Most notably, Huyse 2002, 302–3, where he states: “si Šābuhr a vraiment eu une idée quelconque de ces ancêtres, ce sont au mieux les Kayanides auxquels il aurait songé.”

43. On the one side, see Kettenhofen 2002, 61, where he states: “Es ist also m. E. nicht abwegig zu behaupten, dass die ‘Uhrannen’ (ŠKZ, parth., Z. 16: *hsynkn*), von denen Šāpuhr I. in seinen *res gestae* spricht, mit den Kayāniden zu identifizieren sind; jedenfalls halte ich es für methodisch unstatthaft, nur die Gleichsetzung mit den Achaimeniden zu erwägen . . . [Kettenhofen's emphasis throughout].” On the other side, see Wiesehöfer 2002a, 113: “Während mit dem Terminus *niyāgan* zweifellos auf Šābuhrs Großvater Pābag und den ‘Dynastiegründer’ Sāsān angespielt wird, herrscht Uneinigkeit in der Forschung bzgl. der *ahēnagan*. Doch ganz gleich, ob die Sasaniden mit letzteren die mythischen Könige Irans (etwa die Kayāniden) oder historische, ihnen aber nicht mehr bekannte Könige Irans (und damit letztlich die Achaimeniden) gemeint haben, das Verschwinden genauer Erinnerungen an Meder und Achaimeniden muß auf jeden Fall vor dem Aufstieg der Sasaniden zur Herrschaft über Eran ud Aneran stattgefunden haben . . . [Wiesehöfer's emphasis throughout]”; also Wiesehöfer 2005a, 113–14; Wiesehöfer 2005b, 141–42. See also, in line with Wiesehöfer's position, Daryaei 2002, 1–14; Daryaei 2006a, 493–503; Daryaei 2006b, 387–93.

44. Cassius Dio 80.3.4.
45. Herodianus 6.2.1–2, and 6.4.5–6.
46. On Dio's sources in general, see Millar 1964, 28–46 and 170–73; Bering-Staschewski 1981, 112–13; Barnes 1984, 249; Alföldy 1989a, 234–35: “für die Lage in Persien müssen offizielle Meldungen und Lageberichte sein Quellenmaterial dargestellt haben.”
47. See Alföldy 1989a, 234; de Blois 1997, 2652–53.
48. See Kettenhofen 2002, 55–56. On the composition date of Herodian's work during the reign of Gordian III, or Philippus Arabs, see Alföldy 1989b, 245–55, 270; Zimmermann 1999, 285–302, esp. 300. Compare also Sidebottom 1997, 271–76, for a later date, following upon Philippus Arabs' reign, between 260–268 c.e.
49. On Herodian's dependence on Dio, see Alföldy 1989a, 234–35; Zimmermann 1999, 242, 290, 324. For a survey of scholarly assessment of Herodian's *Quellenwert*, see Kettenhofen 2002, 53–58, and more recently, Hidber 2006, 45–71, esp. 63–64; also, Schmidt 1997, 2640–44; compare Sidebottom 1998, 2780–92, who, while recognizing the use of Dio by Herodian, is nonetheless very skeptical of Dio's being Herodian's main source; similarly Kuhn-Chen 2002, 264–65.
50. See Zimmermann 1999, 242 and 247.
51. Ammianus Marcellinus 17.5.5–6.
52. On the sources of Ammianus Marcellinus in general, see Thomson 1947, 20–41, esp. 39–40; also

Sabbah 1978, 115–239 and 65–111, as well as the more recent survey of Rosen 1982, 52–86. Also Fornara 1992, 420–38; and Barnes 1993, 55–70.

53. The authenticity of Ammianus Marcellinus' alleged letter of Šābuhr II has been variously assessed. Pighi 1936, 187–88, suggests that Ammianus Marcellinus was able to reproduce correctly the tenor of Šābuhr II's letter; similarly Rosen 1982, 64. Christensen 1971, 237–38, and Laistner 1947, 149, consider Šābuhr II's letter to be based upon genuine Iranian material; similarly Matthews 1989, 39–40, 485, n. 12, Matthews 1986, 557–58, 563, n. 12, and Winter and Dignas 2001, 83–84. In contrast, Thomson 1947, 36; Wirth 1980–1981, 312, n. 17; and Kettenhofen 1984, 183–84; doubt the reliability of the letter attributed to Sabuhr II; compare also de Jonge 1977, 134–44.

54. Compare Calmeyer 1987, 142–43, who seems to posit that the frequency of classical testimonies attesting Sasanian claims on Achaemenid territories would exclude the possibility of them being accidental or fictional; see, however, Huyse 2002, 300.

55. The Sasanian inscriptions—with the exception of the Paikuli inscription—in the present paper are cited based upon a new critical edition, which I am currently preparing by relying on new comprehensive silicone molds and photographic documentation made of the entire Sasanian epigraphic corpus in 2003, and which are presently stored at the *Fowler Museum at UCLA*. Text passages are cited, whenever applicable, in the version that has been best preserved, either in Middle Persian, or Parthian.

56. In the clause . . . *kē amāh ud pidar ud niyāgān ud hasēnagān dastgerd būd . . .*, *pidar*, *niyāgān* and *hasēnagān* are all in the oblique case, *pidar* in the singular oblique and *niyāgān* and *hasēnagān* in the plural oblique; their respective direct cases are *pid* (sg.), *niyāg* (pl.), and *hasēnag* (pl.). For an exhaustive discussion of the nominal “two-case system” in inscriptional Middle Persian, Parthian, and the Pahlavi Psalter, see Skjærvø 1983, 47–62, 151–81, esp. 51, 154, and 176–78; also Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, III, 2, 132–35.

57. See Huyse 2002, 302.

58. The Paikuli inscription is cited according to Humbach and Skjærvø 1978–1983.

59. Humbach and Skjærvø 1983, III, 2, 114 and 109.

60. ŠKZ, Pth., 1.

61. ŠKZ, Pth., 20; see also Alam 1986, 185.

62. The Old Persian version of A²Sa is cited after the collation of Stève 1987, 88–90.

63. See Stève 1987, 90.

64. See Sims-Williams and Cribb 1995–1996, 77–142; for the dating 105–7.

65. See Sims-Williams and Cribb 1995–1996, 94, where it is compared with *pro-avus*.

66. See Sims-Williams and Cribb 1995–1996, 86.

67. See Sims-Williams and Cribb 1995–1996, 100; Cribb 1993, 130–32.

68. See Konow 1929, 67–70 and 70–77.

69. See Konow 1929, 135: “[1] *mahārājo rājātirājo devaputra* [2] *Kušanapu[t]r[o] ša]hi [Vema] Ta[k]a-ḍa]masya* [3] . . .,” “The great king, king of kings, son of god(s), the Kušān, son of Kušān, King Vema Takto.”

70. See Lüders 1961, 131–38.

71. See Rubin 1998, 179–80; and Rubin 2001, 646–47.

72. See among others, Dąbrowa 1983, 103–4; Calmeyer 1987, 142–43; Kettenhofen 1986, 177–78; Panitschek 1990, 459; Wiesehöfer 1994, 392; Wiesehöfer 2000, 714; Wiesehöfer 2002a, 113; Wiesehöfer 2002b, 296.

73. See Wolski 1993, 152–63.

74. See as an example of the *Alexandrophobia* expressed in Middle Persian texts, this passage of the Dēnkard: *Dārāy ī Dārāyān hamāg Abestāg ud Zand čiyōn Zardušt az Ōhrmazd padīrift, nibištāg 2 pač-čēn, yak pad ganj ī *šāhigān yak pad diz ī nibišt dāstan framūd. Walaxš ī Aškānān Abestāg ud Zand čiyōn abēzagihā andar āmad ēstād hammōg-iz ī aziš harw čē az wizend ud āsuftkārih ī Aleksandar ud ēwār ud rōb ī Hrōmāyān andar Ērānšahr pargandagihā abar nibištāg tā čē uzwān abespārīšnīg pad dastwar mād ēstād andar šahr čiyōn frāz āmad ēstād nigāh dāstan ō šahrīhā ayādgār kerdan framūd . . .* “Dārāy son of Dārāy ordered that two written copies of all of the Avesta and the Zand (Exegesis), as Zarathustra had received them from (God) Ōhrmazd, be kept, one in the royal treasury, and one in the fortress of writings. Walaxš, the Arsacid, ordered the provinces to remember preserving the Avesta and the Zand (Exegesis), as they had come down in purity, also all teaching from it, which remained in authority, following the harm and desolation of Alexander and the plundering and robbery of the Romans (= Macedonians), in Ērānšahr in scattered form in writing, or even oral transmission, as soon as they came to light within the empire”; see Dresden 1966, 511, ll. 1–8.

75. Similarly Huyse 2002, 307. On Alexander's representation in the Iranian *Überlieferung*, see also Wiesehöfer 1994, 393–97. Also Shayegan forthcoming, with older literature.

76. See Wiesehöfer 2000, 706–21, who conveniently provides the sundry cases of Arsacid relationship with the Hellenistic world. Also Shayegan forthcoming.

77. Strabo 9.11.3.

78. Synkellos 539; see Mosshammer 1984, 343, ll. 1–10; also Adler and Tuffin 2002, 412.

79. See Wiesehöfer 2002a, 112–13.

80. See Panitschek 1990, 460–61. On Mithridates Eupator's political ideology, see McGing 1986, 89–108, especially 107–8; Ballesteros Pastor 1994, 115–33; and Ballesteros Pastor 1996, 379–416.

81. On the Alexander imitation of Pompeius, Caesar, and Antonius, see Michel 1968, 35–135.

82. On the treaty of 20 B.C.E. and its implications for Rome and the Arsacid empire, see Ziegler 1964, 45–52.

83. On the Roman perception of the Arsacids in the Augustan age, see Sonnabend 1986, 198–221; Spawforth 1994, 233–69; also, Wiesehöfer 2005b, 111–26. On the depiction of the Parthians in Roman art of the Augustan era, see Schneider 1986; Schneider 1996, 19–30; Schneider 1998, 95–127; on the complex and conflicting images of the “(handsome) Oriental” as Rome’s foe and friend and its implications for Roman identity and projection of might in the East, see Schneider 2006, 241–44; and Schneider 2007, 50–79, esp. 69–70 and 79.

84. On the *divisio*, see Sonnabend 1986, 202–3; and 209–10.

85. See Kienast 1969, 453; see also Ceaușescu 1974, 167: “[l]a politique nationale inaugurée par Auguste et l’imitation d’Alexandre étaient donc irréconciliables.”

86. On Trajan’s Parthian wars from the perspective of 4th century Rome, see Lightfoot 1990, 115–26.

87. On the Alexander imitation of Caracalla and Alexander Severus, see Shayegan 2004, 293–302, with older literature.

88. On Julian’s *imitatio*, see the nuanced remarks of Fox 1997, 239–52; also very skeptical Bringmann 2004, 169–70; more open to the idea of the *imitatio* is Rosen 2006, 360.

89. See the pertinent remarks of Panitschek 1990, 471–72; also Shayegan 2003, 372–73; and Shayegan 2004, 293–315.

90. Christensen 1971, 237–38, had recognized some striking similarities between the titulature of Šābuhr II, as reported by Ammianus Marcellinus, and the official titulature of Sasanian kings in their inscriptions, as well as the titles attributed to Sasanian kings by Armenian authors. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, Šābuhr II calls himself: *Rex Regum Sapor, particeps siderum, frater Solis et Lunae* . . . “(I) Sapor, King of Kings, partner of the Stars, brother of the Sun and Moon . . .,” which resembles the titulature of Šābuhr II in an alleged letter to Tiran, as reported by Moses Khorenats’i: “the most valiant of the Mazdaeans [*Mazdezants’ k’aj*], the equal of the sun [*bardzakits’ arekagan*], Shapuh, king of kings . . .” See Thomson 1978, 271, nn. 4–5. Compare for a diverging view Huyse 1993, 92.

91. Huyse 1993, 91–93, has thoroughly re-examined the tenor of Šābuhr II’s letter to the Roman Caesar as reported by Ammianus Marcellinus. Although I agree with his conclusions that the introduction (17.5.3–4), the opening of the main part starting with the extent of Šābuhr’s territorial revendication *ad usque Strymona flumen et Macedonicos fines* . . . to . . . *vetustis*

regibus antistantem (17.5.5), and probably the entire conclusion beginning with *postremo* . . . (17.5.7) do not contain much “echt Persisches” and are literary fabrications to be attributed to Ammianus Marcellinus himself, I, nonetheless, think that—aside from the *Sprachgut* Huyse has shown to derive from Middle Persian—most of the main part from *sed ubique mihi cordi est* . . . to . . . *laudari debere bellorum eventus* (17.5.5–6) is based upon Iranian material, as the comparison of the aforesaid passage with the content of Iranian inscriptions clearly demonstrates.

92. DNB is cited after the recent edition of Schmitt 2000, 33–44; for the analogous inscription of Xerxes at Persepolis (XP1) compare Schmitt 1996 [1998], 15–23.

93. The reading *recta ratio* is a conjecture based upon the editions of Lucarini 2005, and Wagner and Erfurdt 1808. It is followed by Rolfe 1935–1939, 334. The edition of Clark 1910–1915, 114, as well as the more recent editions of Sabbah 1970, 53, and Seyfarth 1978, 112, read, on the basis of the *Codex Fuldensis* (V), *recordatio* for *recta ratio*.

94. The grandfather (*avus*) is Narseh who in 296–297 suffered a defeat by the Caesar Galerius acting on the orders of the Augustus Diocletian. In the following peace treaty of Nisibis (297–298) between the Sasanian empire and Rome, Narseh gave up five Armenian provinces, as well as the sovereignty over Iberia; see Chaumont 1969, 113–29; Enßlin 1942, 44–51; Winter 1988, 212–15; Ziegler 1964, 144–46.

95. See Pigghi 1936, 187.

96. See also Kettenhofen 1984, 190; Huyse 1993, 93.

97. Ammianus Marcellinus 17.5.11.

98. As pointed out by Huyse 2002, 307, Xerxes is well attested in the literature of 4th century Rome, especially in the guise of the Great King invading Hellas. Various passages in the works of Julian and Libanius compare Šābuhr II (or the Sasanians), the aggressor(s) of Rome, with Xerxes, the aggressor of Hellas, see Julian *orationes* 1.28, 2.63, 2.79; and Libanius *epistulae* 41.3, 109.1.

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